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ABSTRACT

This study is a result of a survey taken at 24 randomly selected middle and junior high schools in Indiana for the purpose of examining user perceptions of media staff and school media centers. Media staff members were surveyed, as well as students and teachers, and responses were compared between groups and within groups. Demographic data were also compared, including years of experience, years of service, subject taught, and grade in school. Results of the survey showed that few schools had broken away from the tradition of being more accommodating to teachers than to students, and also that only about one third of the media specialists examined were involved in any curriculum planning or instructional development. Data also showed that the media specialist had not broken out of the traditional role, i.e., keeper of the books. It is suggested that media specialists assume a more active role and work with teachers to bring about change. (Author/AP)

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COMPARING MEDIA STAFF AND USER PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL MEDIA CENTER SERVICES

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COMPARING MEDIA STAFF AND USER PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL MEDIA CENTER SERVICES

As media professionals I think we're all beginning to realize the importance of evaluating our library programs. Traditionally, we have measured a library program by how effective the librarian said it was. However, we now realize that the success or failure of our program often depends not on how we view the program, but rather on how our users view it, which means that we must try to determine the needs of our patrons. In addition, we need to find out how aware they are of all the services we offer. It is often exasperating to find teachers totally unaware of a service that you provide, even though you've made considerable effort to advertise it. At times like this, you begin to wonder what services others are unaware of and whether all services are reaching all users.

In the spring of 1976, I surveyed twenty-four randomly selected middle and junior high schools in Indiana. I surveyed those providing the services -- the media staff -- as well as those receiving the services -- the teachers and the students. All of the media staff, all of the teachers, and about one half of the students in each school were asked to respond to the survey. This meant that I was getting input from library nonusers as well as users. I'm sure there are some of us who feel that only those who use the library are qualified to make judgments about it, but I think there are more and more of us who feel that we must begin seeking input from our nonusers too.

Surprisingly, in all of the schools I surveyed, none of the media specialists questioned the inclusion of student nonusers. However, many questioned the inclusion of teacher nonusers. Follow-up interviews led

me to believe that the librarians are very aware of the teachers who do not use the library. We don't seem to have quite as good a handle on the students who do not use the library. We perhaps naturally assume that because the library is full and bustling with activity all day every day that we are reaching all of the students when in reality we may be seeing the same percentage of students day after day.

To survey the respondents, I used the "Purdue Self-Evaluation System" (PSES) which includes a list of services which a school media center could provide. Although the instrument itself covers nine categories, I examined services in only four categories: utilization, planning, production, and evaluation. All people responded with a frequency scale of "regularly," "occasionally," "rarely or never," and "don't know." Responses made were compared between groups and within groups. Their responses to certain demographic items were also compared. These demographic items included such things as years of experience, years of service in the present position, subject taught, grade in school, sex, etc.

Each group was scored on how they perceived their media center's services. The mean scores of the groups were compared to see if they agreed as to the types of services available and the frequency with which they were offered. Agreement was found between teachers and media staff at approximately the fifty percent level. In other words, if the media specialist reported performing a service regularly, approximately fifty percent of the school's teachers agreed. No agreement was found between media staff and students.

To determine whether services were being equally dispersed throughout the school, teacher responses were compared to student responses; both were then compared to the media staff responses. Unfortunately, I found that services were not equally provided to both groups. Particularly in the areas of utilization and production, teachers were receiving more services more frequently. Fourteen percent of the students responded that they were provided facilities or equipment with which to produce AV materials. In contrast, fifty percent of the teachers said this was a service provided to them regularly. Overall, the production of audio-visual materials was found to be an occasionally performed rather than a regularly performed service.

I felt that schools were beginning to provide more in the way of production services as there were a few schools who were providing a full range of production services to teachers and one school which was providing production services to students on a regular basis. This particular school, I should add, was one of the larger schools with a three-person media staff -- one professional with two support staff. Students in this school had just completed production of a motion picture which was to be used as part of an orientation to in-coming seventh-graders. However, this school was atypical compared to the other schools examined, at least with respect to the AV production area.

All three groups were in relative agreement about which production services were offered the most frequently and which were offered the least frequently. Both teachers and students reported that facilities and equipment for the production of AV materials were provided more often than supplies and help from the media staff. And although both teachers and students had some access to facilities, equipment, and supplies, a

marked decrease was seen in both groups when asked how often the media staff produced AV materials for them. The small number of schools providing this service probably could be attributed to lack of money, limited facilities, and inadequate support staff. At any rate, all responses indicated limited involvement of the media staff in the entire AV production area.

Few of the schools examined had broken away from the tradition of being more accommodating to teachers than to students. This could be due to better rapport with the teachers than with the students or it could be due to an emphasis on instructional rather than recreational use of the library. One inner-city school had literally closed it doors to students who wanted to use the library for recreational purposes. Students were scheduled by class into the library for one 45-minute period every other week to work on class assignments. They were not permitted to come to the library either individually or by group for recreational purposes. The media specialist and principal both spoke in glowing terms about their media center which, they said, was full almost every period.

Only about one third of the media specialists examined were involved in any way in curriculum planning or instructional development. This included working with a teacher in planning a unit of instruction, helping to evaluate the success of any class project which involved the media center, serving on the curriculum committee, or even consulting with the curriculum committee.

Areas in which the media staff was providing the most assistance were in gathering materials and suggesting materials of varying interest levels. The data indicated that in this area, too, media specialist have not yet broken out of their traditional role -- that of being keeper of the books.

In no area was the media specialist considered to be even an equal partner with teachers in helping to determine goals and objectives of the educational program, let alone being instrumental in bringing about change.

Unfortunately, media specialists haven't developed the habit of following through on the materials they have gathered or suggested. To simply ask the questions, "How were your students' reports last week?" "Were they able to find what they needed?" "Did we have enough materials for them?" would be a very simple beginning.

As part of the demographic section, teachers were asked to categorize themselves as library users. This information was crossmatched by subject area, experience, and sex.

For a long time, you know, language arts, social studies, and science teachers have been the heaviest users of the library services, but the language arts, social studies, and science teachers surveyed in this study were not the heaviest users of the media center. In fact, the differences found among the teachers were such that it would be difficult to specify any specific subject areas as being the greater users of media center services. This could be due to the fact that materials are available now in subject areas that weren't available before. And too, the changed formats of some subject areas could be responsible for a shift in usage. Whatever the reasons, this apparent increase in usage by other subject areas should have an impact on our selection practices. No area of the curriculum should be slighted in preference to the traditional few.

A finding that was relatively unexpected was that the men reported visiting the media center more frequently, but women reported using a wider variety of services. A comparison of usage with years of experience revealed that teachers who had over fifteen years of experience were using more services than were other teachers. Presumably, a teacher with more years of experience would be more aware of the services available and consequently would use more of them.

I checked the media specialists in the same way -- crossmatched their years of experience with the services they said they were providing. And I got similar results. The media specialists who had over fifteen years of experience were providing more services than the other media specialists examined.

Perhaps media specialists who have more experience are in a better position to offer more services. A media specialist new on the job may not have had time to institute very many services. After all, basic services need to be incorporated first; expansion of service offerings sometimes takes several years to implement. Certainly, the media specialist of longer tenure should be in a better position to know the school's curricular needs as well as being more familiar with the patrons and their needs.

To summarize, it was concluded that media specialists were not considered to be an integral part of curriculum planning and instructional development. Media specialists still seemed to occupy a passive and peripheral position in the school.

Most schools were providing production services to teachers. Some were providing production services to students. The number of users having access to facilities and equipment for "do-it-yourself" projects

was encouraging. Less encouraging was the fact that few schools were involved to the point that they were providing complete production services to either teachers or students.

While the study would seem to indicate that there has been an increase in the frequency with which services in these areas are offered, the size of the increase was small enough that these service areas should remain a matter of concern to those of us in the profession.